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# STATEMENT AND RESIGNATION

OF

PRESIDENT JOHN W. ABERCROMBIE

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

With Resolutions Adopted by the Board of Trustees

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THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA.

Gentlemen :

It is generally understood that you have under consideration the advisability of making a change in the presidency of the University. For that and other reasons which will appear later, it will not be inappropriate for me to submit this statement. In fact, it seems to be necessary, that justice may be done to all of the interests involved, namely, the University, the State, the Board and myself.

In order to determine whether my administration has been such as to merit approval and deserve continuation, it will be necessary to compare subsequent and present conditions with those which existed before and at the time of my election. If after a trial of nine years such a comparison does not indicate satisfactory progress in the development of the institution, it is manifestly your duty to make a change. If, on the contrary, it should show substantial and satisfactory progress, I respectfully submit that, under the circumstances, it is equally your duty to all concerned so to declare in no uncertain terms.

Prior to my election in 1902, I had been for several years as State Superintendent of Education, *EX OFFICIO*, a member of the Board of Trustees. Hence the statements which I make are based upon a personal knowledge of the facts.

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## FORMER CONDITIONS

For years the University had been in a state of unrest, and at times of almost complete disruption. Important internal details which in all successfully conducted institutions are delegated to the president and faculty, were sought to be administered directly by the Board of Trustees, the results of which unwise and impracticable policy were the embarrassment and weakening of the college authorities in the performance of their duties, frequent appeals to the Board from students and parents in matters relating to discipline and scholarship, the application of political methods in the conduct of important internal affairs, the involuntary resignation of presidents and other officers who should have been sustained and retained. No officer, however competent and faithful, felt secure in his position. The University was in disrepute among both the alumni and the great mass of the people, especially the latter. As was aptly and forcefully stated by a member of the Board itself, "The institution was almost trusted to death."

## ELECTION AND POWERS

When the University was in that condition; when the three preceding presidents, all able men, had deemed it wise if not necessary to resign, two within a year; when the presidency was generally regarded as a death-trap,—I was approached by certain members of the Board of Trustees, two of whom are still members and will recall the incident, and asked if I would accept the position. I answered that I would not think of doing so under conditions and terms that had brought failure to other and abler men; that in my opinion the Board itself had been responsible for practically all of the University's troubles and lack of progress; and that I saw no prospect of a change of policy upon the part of the Board. They replied that they had been favorably impressed with the suggestions which I had offered from time to time; that the former policies of the Board had proved to be unsatisfactory and disastrous; that they considered me to be the best man for the position; and that they believed the Board would be pleased to have me accept the presidency upon my own terms.

The result was that finally I consented to accept with the

understanding that I should be elected for an indeterminate period, either party being at liberty to sever the connection at will; that I should nominate all subordinate officers, subject to confirmation by election by the Board; that I with the faculty should have original and final jurisdiction in all matters pertaining to discipline; and that I should have and exercise such other powers as might prove to be necessary for a successful administration of the University. Afterwards I was made, *ex officio*, a member of each of the standing committees of the Board, with all of the privileges and powers of members except that of voting.

Under these conditions and terms, some formally and some informally stated, I entered upon a performance of my duties. It is unnecessary for me to assure you that I have found the position to be no sinecure, no easy-chair, no bed of roses. With what degree of success I have served, the record itself should testify.

#### MATERIAL EQUIPMENT

I found the material equipment to be very inadequate, far inferior to that of many high schools in other states, and with a valuation of about \$250,000.00. The plant has been reconstructed and enlarged, and when the recently authorized State appropriation has been expended will represent a valuation of about \$850,000.00, an increase of \$600,000.00, or 240 per cent.

Three large college buildings, beautiful and well-appointed, have been erected. The first, Comer Hall, accomodates the new college of engineering with its laboratories, the department of physics and the power plant; the second, Smith Hall, houses the state geological survey, the geological museum and the departments of geology and biology; in the third, Morgan Hall, will be located the college of arts and sciences, the school of education, the auditorium and temporarily the offices of administration.

Electric lighting, steam heating, water and sewerage systems have been installed; the college dormitories have been remodeled and equipped with modern conveniences; the building of the school of medicine has been remodeled and enlarged, and supplied with needed laboratory apparatus; the dining-room and kitchen have been improved, the latter being completely rebuilt and equipped with up-to-date culinary furnishings.

A concrete building with reinforced concrete dam has been erected on the University spring branch for the accomodation of the hydraulic engineering laboratory, and the old laundry building has been converted into a foundry and black-smith shop for the department of mechanical engineering.

The school of law now occupies a separate building, the one formerly devoted to physics. It is necessary no longer to use the dormitories for teaching purposes. With the erection of the four other buildings in contemplation (library, gymnasium, Y. M. C. A. hall and dormitory for women), the material equipment will be practically complete.

### MAINTENANCE INCOME

In 1902 the income from State appropriations for maintenance was \$36,000.00, the sum fixed by the constitution as interest on the amount due by the State for moneys received from the sale of University lands. Then the annual income from the endowment was almost negligible, being only \$50.00 for the preceding year.

At each regular session of the the Legislature since that date, additional appropriations for support have been made, and when the recently authorized appropriations are available the annual maintenance income from the State will amount to \$121,000.00, an increase of \$85,000.00, or 236 per cent. If to the amount appropriate by the State be added the sum of \$20,000.00, the present income from the endowment, and the further sum of \$3,000.00, a donation from the General Education Board for the salary and traveling expenses of a professor of secondary education, the total annual income for support, excluding the sum received from fees, which has doubled, amounts to \$144,000.00, an increase of \$108,000.00, or 300 per cent.

### NEW APPROPRIATIONS

At the close of the quadrennial period beginning on January 1st, 1911, the new appropriations for equipment and support authorized by the Legislature during my administration will amount to \$1,040,000.00, which sum is greater by \$980,000.00 than the amount of similar appropriations for the preceding equal period. In making these appropriations the State is only doing for her university what other states are doing for theirs.

## THE ENDOWMENT

When I came to the presidency practically all receipts from royalties on leased coal lands were used for running expenses. Now all of such receipts, amounting to about \$10,000.00 annually, are placed to the credit of the endowment fund. Then the endowment fund amounted to \$2500.00. Now that fund, which is composed of Alabama bonds and land notes, amounts to \$441,000.00, and the annual income is \$20,000.00. The increase in the fund itself has been \$438,500.00, or 17540 per cent, while the increase in the annual income from the fund has been \$19950.00, or 39900 per cent.

## ALUMNI LOAN FUND

The Alumni Loan Fund, established 25 years ago under the leadership of that stalwart and enthusiastic alumnus, James H. Fitts, has grown since 1902 from \$4000.00 to \$16000.00, an increase of \$12000.00, or 300 per cent. Hundreds of young men and women have received assistance from this fund, and many who have graduated could not have done so without such assistance.

## COST OF ADMINISTRATION

It has been charged that the University is not being economically administered. That there is no ground for this criticism is disclosed by a comparison with other institutions. For the session of 1908-9 the average maintenance cost per student in the state universities of Amercia was \$303.00 while the amount expended here was \$189.00, or only 62 per cent of the average.

## DEPARTMENTS AND COURSES

In the college of arts and sciences new courses have been established in biology, chemistry, English, French, German, geology, Greek, Latin, mathematics and physical training.

In the college of engineering the departments of chemical, electrical, highway, mechanical and mining engineering have been organized, and new courses have been established in chemical, civil, electrical, highway, mechanical and mining engineering.

In the school of law several new courses have been added,

and the number of weekly lectures and recitations has been doubled.

The school of medicine has been reorganized and closely articulated with the University. In both law and administration it is now as much an organic part of the institution as is any other branch. The school has been placed in class A by the council on education of the American medical association.

The school of education has been established and has for its object the training of principals and teachers for high schools. It promises to render valuable services to the State in the high school development now in progress.

The summer school for teachers has been established, the Legislature making for its maintenance a special annual appropriation of \$5000.00. Two thousand teachers and prospective teachers have been in attendance. It is impossible to estimate the good accomplished by this school. That it has been of great and lasting benefit to the University, to the State and to the teaching profession is conceded by all students of education. It was the forerunner of the numerous other schools of like character, and may be called the mother of vacation schools in Alabama.

The library has been reorganized after the most approved of modern systems, a professionally trained librarian has been placed in charge, and the sum of \$10,000.00 has been expended for new books.

The organization of a school of business administration has been suggested—not an ordinary so-called business college, in which book-keeping, stenography and typewriting are taught to immature and unprepared boys and girls, but a school of collegiate grade, in which will be offered courses in commercial law, the law of real property, banking, economics, insurance, transportation, business administration, etc.

#### EXPANSION OF FACULTY

The faculty always unusually strong and efficient considering the funds available for salaries, has been strengthened and expanded. Few institutions can claim a faculty containing a larger percentage of men who have made the maximum of preparation for their work. In the nomination of teachers,



preference has been given to those available men who were best qualified by training and experience, and without regard to politics, family influence, place of birth, denominational affiliation or religious creed.

The positions established during my incumbency are as follows: The University deanship; the deanships of the college of arts and sciences, the college of engineering and the school of education; the professorships of education, secondary education, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, mining engineering, rhetoric and public speaking, physical training, anatomy, physiology, pharmacology and bacteriology; the associate professorship of geology; the adjunct professorships of English, chemistry and mathematics; the instructorships in biology, mathematics, modern languages and physics; four teaching fellowships; the Y. M. C. A. secretarship; and the positions of burrar-registrar, superintendent of power plant, chief engineer, keeper of buildings and grounds, mechanic, assistant engineers, firemen and janitors. In 1902 the officers of administration numbered 51; the number last year was 76.

### ENROLLMENT

In 1902 the enrollment was as follows: academic department, 167; engineering department, 7; law department, 67; medical department, 165. Total, omitting repetitions, 396.

The enrollment this year was as follows: college of arts and sciences (academic department), 257; college of engineering (engineering department), 68; school of law (law department), 80; school of medicine (medical department), 170; summer school for teachers, 269. Total, omitting repetitions, 840.

The enrollment at Mobile remains practically unchanged, while in the college of engineering the enrollment has advanced from 7 to 68, an increase of 781 per cent. Combining the enrollment at Tuscaloosa there has been an increase in the regular session of 166, or 70 per cent. If the summer school be counted, the increase at Tuscaloosa is 435, or 182 per cent. Counting three students in the summer school as the equivalent of one in the regular session, the increase at Tuscaloosa is still considerably above 100 per cent.

If for each preceding nine-year period since the opening of the University the percentage of increase in the regular session enrollment had been the same as that for the period under consideration, the enrollment would now be 5,813.

## RAISING OF STANDARDS

Nine years ago our academic degrees were not accepted at full value by the standard universities. One of our most brilliant graduates with the degree of bachelor of arts had recently spent two years at a standard institution in order to obtain the same degree.

Now our degrees are recognized. The holder of our bachelor's degree is admitted by standard universities as a candidate for the master's degree in one year. In other words, the University has been raised to the national standard for admission and graduation, and it is no longer necessary for our young men and women to go to other states in order to obtain standard university training.

This advance of two years upon the part of the University has contributed largely to the recent remarkable high school development in Alabama. When the advance was made there were not a dozen high schools with four-year courses; now there are 70 such high schools, 30 three-year high schools and quite a number of one and two-year high schools.

This development would have been impossible if the University had continued in competition with the high schools. Students cannot be held in the upper classes of the high schools if the colleges receive them before they have practically completed the high school course. Besides, as was stated in your recent report to the legislature, "it would be an unwise and inexcusable expenditure of public funds unnecessarily to duplicate at the University the instruction which is available in the high schools."

While on account of the advanced standards there has been no material increase in the enrollment during the last two years, but on the contrary a considerable decrease at Mobile, as soon as the period of re-adjustment is passed we may look for a steady and satisfactory growth. This has been the result elsewhere. Though, as stated in your legislative report, "it is unreasonable to expect the head of our educational system to exceed or even equal the lower branches of the system in the number of students enrolled. In any articulated system of schools, the higher the grade or division the smaller will be the enrollment and the greater the per capita cost for maintenance."

The thoughtless clamor for a larger enrollment could be met easily by a lowering of the entrance and graduation requirements. If the requirements were lowered to the standard of ten years ago, the enrollment in five years would probably approximate a thousand, but such a course would place the University in direct and unnecessary competition with the lower-grade state-supported institutions, and compel our youths to go without the best of university training, or to seek it at greater expense in other and more progressive commonwealths.

The doubling of our enrollment by this method would not result in the building of a greater university; on the contrary, the result would be the destruction of the university we have developed. Students who are prepared to receive university instruction are as necessary as are buildings, libraries, laboratories and faculties.

A thousand students of high school grade would not constitute a university. The head of a public school system should be in advance of the other branches of the system; otherwise there is no head, no system. It has been one of the policies of my administration to endeavor to place the University at the head of the State's public school system, and in the pursuance of this policy I have sought and received the hearty co-operation of the public school forces.

### HIGH SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

It may not be generally known, but it is nevertheless a fact that the University more than any other agency has been responsible for the development of high schools in Alabama. Six years ago, through the generosity of the General Education Board, a professor of secondary education was employed and placed in the field with the view of cultivating among the people, by visitation and by public and private appeal, a sentiment which would stand for the establishment, support and improvement of high schools. The effort succeeded beyond expectations, and at the first session of the Legislature held thereafter the present high school law was enacted.

Having been instrumental in the establishment of high schools, it was the duty of the University, as well as to its highest interest, to co-operate in their organization and administra-

tion. Indeed, without such co-operation the movement would have been greatly retarded, if not completely destroyed.

High school facilities are essential to the existence of universities, and such facilities in adequate form are absolutely necessary to a university's best growth. For the University to stand in the way of the development of high schools would be suicidal. For it to resolve itself into a high school, as is demanded by thoughtless critics, would be the acme of unwisdom.

### **HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION**

The University took the initiative three years ago in the organization of the Alabama Association of High Schools with the view of bringing about a closer articulation of the high schools with both the colleges and the elementary schools, and such has been the result. It is as necessary for the high schools to keep out of the field of the elementary schools, as that the colleges should not trespass upon the domain of the high schools. This association is exerting a powerful and wholesome influence in the revolutionary process now taking place in the re-organization of the State's educational system.

### **ALABAMA COLLEGE ASSOCIATION**

Another important movement for which the University is responsible is the organization of the colleges of the State. The Alabama Association of Colleges was organized in 1908, and has for its objects the elevation of collegiate standards, the proper and uniform enforcement of admission and graduation requirements, the articulation of the colleges with high schools and the consideration of other problems relating to college administration.

### **DISCIPLINE AND ATHLETICS**

Other criticisms relate to discipline and athletics, two unsolved and perplexing problems in every institution high or low, large or small. Our disciplinary regulations, as is the case in most other institutions of like grade and character, and as published in the catalog, "are few, simple and reasonable." "The honor system prevails," states the catalog, "and so long as students do the work required and conduct themselves in a becoming manner, they are free to come and go at will. The end aimed at is self-government."

The number of cases calling for discipline is gradually growing smaller. While there have been occasional outbreaks of misconduct the general tendency is upward. This is attested by those who have long been connected with the institution, and is confirmed also by a reference to the records.

In the administration of discipline it has been my policy as far as possible to endeavor to reach and save the individual student, and to that end to inflict the mildest punishments consistent with justice and the general good. Yet, in a number of instances, parents and students have felt aggrieved. It is very difficult so to administer discipline as to leave no ground for complaint upon the part of the offender and his parent or guardian.

The comparatively few who have grievances of this character are usually free with criticisms, while we seldom hear from the many who are satisfied with the manner in which discipline is administered. It is gratifying that during my incumbency no formal appeal has been made to the Board relative to matters of discipline.

Perhaps that feature of my administration which has occasioned most dissatisfaction and criticism has been the policy pursued relative to intercollegiate athletics. How to encourage this popular form of student activities, and at the same time to hold the participants to a reasonable standard of scholarship and honesty, is a most perplexing problem in all of our colleges.

A certain element demands of us winning teams. In order to secure such teams every conceivable pressure is brought to bear upon the authorities to induce them to condone, if not to participate actively in the playing of men who are failing in their studies, or who are known to be ineligible under the rules of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association with which the University is affiliated, and with the enforcement of whose regulations the president and faculty are charged.

When I realized a few years ago that the authorities were being imposed upon by outside influences, that ineligible men were being paid money to register as students for the purpose of having them represent the institution on traveling athletic teams, and that at least one such man had been matriculated and graduated under an assumed name, I resolved that no such disgraceful imposition should again occur. I resolved also to

hold members of traveling teams of all kinds to a reasonable scholastic standard. The faculty endorsed this course, and has co-operated with me in the endeavor to follow it. Since that time the regulations as to scholarship and general eligibility have been firmly and effectively enforced, and as a result we have absolutely clean athletics at the University.

This action is the basis of the many criticisms of the president and faculty relative to intercollegiate athletics. As for myself I do not consider the mere winning of athletic games to be the chief object of an institution of learning, and am unwilling to subordinate thereto all scholastic standards and ethical principles. I have no ambition whatever to preside over a corruptly conducted athletic club though it be called by the dignified name of the University of Alabama.

#### STUDENT BOARDING ASSOCIATION

In keeping with the practice in many other colleges the boarding department for men has been turned over to the students and is now conducted on the co-operative plan through the student boarding association. The plan works satisfactorily and under it the students themselves do much of the work, such as performing the duties of steward and waiters at tables, for which services they receive reasonable compensation. Under the old plan students were unwilling to engage in this form of labor.

#### UNIVERSITY SUPPLY STORE

Another movement in which the students have co-operated was the establishment of the University supply store, which is conducted under the auspices of the student athletic association, the profits going to the support of college athletics. The store handles books, stationery, fraternity goods, athletic supplies, fruits, candies, etc. It is quite a convenience to students and officers and helps materially in meeting athletic expenses.

#### THE Y. M. C. A.

The Young Men's Christian Association has been reorganized and placed under the direction of a trained secretary who lives with the students and devotes his entire time to religious work. About fifty per cent of the students are members of the association, and it is exerting a wholesome influence over the entire student body. Plans are under consideration for the raising of money with which to provide a separate building for the association.

### OTHER STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Among the student organizations established in recent years are the Glee Club and the Blackfriars. The former provides for its members training in vocal music while the latter devotes itself to the study of the drama. They are traveling organizations and are developing a healthy college spirit among students and alumni.

### SCHOLARSHIPS ESTABLISHED

Three scholarships have been established, namely, the James Harris Fitts Scholarship by Mr. James H. Fitts, the Federation Scholarship by the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Scholarship of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The first is a free scholarship worth four hundred dollars annually, open to men and women on equal terms, and available to those who propose to become professional teachers in Alabama; the second is a loan scholarship worth two hundred dollars annually, and open to women; the third is a free scholarship worth one hundred dollars annually, and available to descendants of Confederate Veterans.

### OFFICIAL STATE TESTING LABORATORY

The engineering laboratories of the University have been designated by the Legislature as the official state testing laboratory for cements and other materials of construction. Frequent and important tests of such materials are made for the people of the State.

### GREATER UNIVERSITY MOVEMENT

While the first important feature of my administration was the abolishment of the military system of discipline in 1902, and the second was the establishment of the summer school in 1904, that from which has come greatest results was the movement for a Greater University inaugurated in 1906, the year of the celebration of our seventy-fifth anniversary. That movement was the outcome of a conference with the president and secretary of the Society of the Alumni, and made possible practically all of the subsequent developments, especially those relating to income and equipment. The movement was carried to success before the Legislature under the able leadership of Mr. Hill Ferguson who was then president of the Society of the Alumni.

## TO WHOM CREDIT IS DUE

Not for a moment would I be understood as claiming for myself all credit for what has been accomplished during my administration. That would be a display of rankest egoism. The achievements mentioned have been made possible through the co-operation of many agencies—the trustees, the faculties, the alumni, the students, the patrons, the educators, the editors, the legislators and the people generally.

To two of the committees of the Board, the executive committee and the building committee, should be accorded special credit; to the former, for the able manner in which the landed estate has been administered, the rapid growth of the endowment fund being attributable directly to its services; to the latter, for the wise expenditure of the appropriations for material equipment.

To the Society of the Alumni, especially its officers, should be given the greatest meed of praise for the increased appropriations and the enlarged enrollment. The Society as a whole has been at all times sympathetic and co-operative.

Special mention also should be made of the valuable services rendered by the faculty, without whose wise advice and cheerful co-operation much of the progress would have been impossible.

## ATTITUDE OF BOARD

As I view the situation the conditions obtaining at the University are with one exception reasonably satisfactory. The exception is the changing attitude of the Board in the matter of according support to the administration. There is developing a condition which if not checked threatens greatly to interfere with future progress. A tendency to drift back into the old practices that wrought such havoc, is apparent. It manifests itself in various ways, especially in the growing disposition of the Board in recent years, either directly or through committee action, to revoke presidential prerogatives originally conferred; to interpose in the administration of regulations pertaining to admission and graduation; to administer directly important internal details which in all successfully conducted institutions are delegated to the president and faculty; to ignore



the president in the consideration of important business transactions, such as the sale, lease, exchange and donation of lands; and generally to return to the policy of administration through political methods.

Our relations are not sufficiently harmonious. I am not receiving that consideration and support essential to continued success in the management of the University. My resignation has not been tendered because of my very great desire as far as possible to direct the expenditure of appropriations which I have been somewhat instrumental in securing, and if possible to establish more firmly the policies for which my administration has stood; and because, further, of my hope that the former effectively harmonious relations might be reestablished.

I would suggest therefore that while you are considering my relations to the Board and to the University, you give attention also to the relations of the Board to the University and to me, for these relations are both mutual and reciprocal, and whatever may be the outcome of this consideration regard should be had for all interests involved. Any action which falls short of this will be unwise and therefore inimical to the University.

It may be that those members of the Board elected since my accession to the presidency do not sanction the terms of the original agreement. It may be that those members who were party to that agreement no longer endorse its terms. In other words, it may be that the Board as now constituted does not believe in the policy of administering the affairs of the institution through the president and faculty, rather than by direct initiative and effort. If this be true it should be so understood.

### CONCLUSION

Given essential powers and accorded adequate support, I have no doubt of my ability to continue to administer the affairs of the University in a reasonably successful manner. In the absence of such powers and such support success would be possible to no man. Under satisfactory terms and conditions, I know of no position more desirable than the presidency of the University of Alabama; under unsatisfactory conditions and terms, I know of no position less desirable.

Permit me in conclusion to say that with a formal endorse-



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ment of my past administration and the assurance of adequate consideration and support in the future, I should be willing to continue the connection indefinitely. In the absence of such action upon your part, please feel at liberty to proceed with the selection of another man.

Respectfully submitted, June 30, 1911.

JOHN W. ABERCROMBIE,  
President.

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### FORMAL RESIGNATION

MONTGOMERY, ALA., JULY 1ST, 1911.

To THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES,  
University of Alabama.

Gentlemen:

I hereby tender my resignation as President of the University of Alabama to take effect at your pleasure, but not later than September 1st, next. I would suggest that the sooner you name my successor the better it will be for the University.

Very truly,  
JOHN W. ABERCROMBIE,  
President.

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### RESOLUTIONS OF BOARD

RESOLVED, That the resignation of Dr. John W. Abercrombie as President of the University be accepted to take effect upon the selection by this Board of his successor, or upon Sept. 1st, 1911, if a successor be not sooner elected.

RESOLVED further, That during such time as Dr. Abercrombie may remain in office he shall have all of the power and authority which heretofore has been conferred upon him.

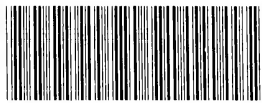
RESOLVED further, That this Board heartily endorses the elevation of the entrance and graduation requirements brought about by Dr. Abercrombie, and has no idea of receding therefrom, and that Dr. Abercrombie be and he hereby is requested to maintain the said requirements as long as he may remain as President of the University.

RESOLVED further, That this Board recognizes that Dr. Abercrombie has given to the University earnest and effective service, and has been a most important factor in the establishment of a Greater University, and that his general policies have met with the endorsement and approval of the Board.

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